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RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1554  
RUEHYN/AMEMBASSY SANAA 1798  
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 0404  
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 0069  
RUEPADJ/CJTTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0656  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASMARA 000603

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/10/2017  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [UNSC](#) [ER](#) [SO](#) [ET](#)  
SUBJECT: SOMALIS IN ERITREA PLAN CONFERENCE AND EXPRESS  
DESIRE TO ENGAGE

REF: A. DOHA 709  
[1](#)B. ASMARA 375

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Classified By: CDA Jennifer A. McIntyre for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In a July 5 conversation, exiled Somali MPs Yusuf Hassan Ibrahim and Fowsiya Mohammad Sheikh Hassan told Poloff that CIC leader Sheikh Sharif and former Speaker of the Parliament Sheikh Aden had agreed to establish a joint preparatory committee for a reconciliation conference. The proposed conference was an outcome of the June meetings held in Doha and would provide a venue for a "genuine" reconciliation conference, in contrast to the upcoming conference in Mogadishu organized by Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG). The preparatory committee, presently meeting in Asmara, is developing a framework and agenda for the conference, which is to be held either in Asmara or Doha in early August and will include the exiled Somali MPs, and representatives from the CIC, TFG, civil society and diaspora. The aims of the conference are to establish a unified political opposition and work toward a peaceful political transition. The MPs categorized the perception of the CIC as an extremist Islamic group as false, emphasizing that Sheikh Sharif and his supporters were, in fact, moderates. The MPs expressed their willingness to engage in conversations with the TFG in seeking a way forward towards a peaceful Somalia and appeared to be sounding out Poloff as an intermediary to communicate their interest to President Yusuf in initiating talks. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) According to former Somali MPs Yusuf and Fowsiya, Sheikh Sharif and Sheikh Aden directed the establishment of a preparatory committee following their June 7-8 Doha meetings (Ref A) to plan for a Somali political reconciliation conference as an alternative to the TFG conference in Mogadishu. The committee members, currently resident in Asmara, include six exiled parliamentarians selected by Sheikh Aden (including Yusuf and Fowsiya), six CIC members selected by Sheikh Sharif, three members of the diaspora and two members of civil society. The planning committee

envisioned a conference occurring in early August which would include representatives of the TFG, exiled parliamentarians, the CIC, civil society, the clans, the diaspora and the business community. Tentatively selected venues are Doha or Asmara, as the MPs stated a meeting in Mogadishu would prove too dangerous for conference participants. The MPs reiterated their previous statements that President Yusuf and his supporters do not truly represent Somalia and therefore any efforts toward reconciliation led by him would result in a stilted and disappointing outcome. MP Yusuf commented, "President Yusuf's plan is a tribal conference based on the assumption that the clans are fighting amongst themselves. There is no tension between the clans, the tension is between the TFG and the anti-TFG alliances."

13. (C) The stated purpose of the conference is two-fold: to create a formal opposition that will be able to work with the TFG and the international community as a united bloc; and to plan for a peaceful political transition after the TFG charter expires in 2009. To reach these long-term goals, MP Yusuf stated the Asmara committee is focusing its immediate planning efforts on: moving forward a political reconciliation process; exploring avenues to work with the TFG; establish a contingency plan for accepting a UN peacekeeping force in Somalia that would include African forces and enable the Ethiopian forces to withdraw; and creating a genuine power sharing agreement within a post-reconciliation government. Yusuf denied rumors that the his group was establishing a government-in-exile in Eritrea; however, Yusuf did comment "if the TFG and President Yusuf continue to insist that they are the only legitimate government of Somalia, we (the opposition) will pursue other options."

14. (C) The MPs acknowledged international concerns about

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extremist elements within the CIC, however, they emphasized that Sheikh Sharif was a moderate, like most of the CIC members. As an illustration, Yusuf noted that the relationship between former TFG Speaker Aden and Sheikh Sharif formed shortly after the CIC came to power, when the two began discussions about establishing a possible coalition government as a means to avoid a war. Unfortunately, according to MP Yusuf the U.S. and the international community now wrongly perceive all CIC elements as extremists and spoilers to a political process. A genuine reconciliation process would moderate such positions in any case, as the parliamentarians, civil society and the diaspora with their "western influence" would serve to balance any Islamic extremist views. Asserting that Sheikh Sharif and the CIC were genuinely interested in cooperation with the U.S. in efforts to counter terrorism, and particular Al'Qaeda elements, he questioned the wisdom of excluding CIC moderates from discussions, noting that such actions only serve to strengthen the extremists. Fowsiya added that while the CIC extremists did not want women represented in the reconciliation process, Sheikh Sharif and his supporters supported greater involvement of women and she has participated freely in discussions and interactions with the CIC, indicating to her the prevailing moderate influence.

15. (C) With regards to engaging with the TFG and President Yusuf, MP Yusuf and MP Fowsiya spoke, for the first time, of a willingness to begin talks with the TFG. (Note: Previously, the exiled parliamentarians forcefully stated they would not negotiate until Ethiopia withdrew and President Yusuf and Prime Minister Gedi stepped down. End note.) MP Yusuf now spoke of an interest in working with the TFG within a process which would lead to Ethiopia's withdrawal, as evidenced by the committees inclusion of TFG representatives their proposed reconciliation conference. Remaining cautious and fearful of Ethiopian influence over any reconciliation process, MP Yusuf told Poloff he remains fearful of Ethiopian influence and that they would prefer the government and the opposition establish a line of

communication outside of Ethiopia's control. Fowsiya further articulated that "we are not spoilers; we want to contribute positively to the resolution of the outcomes of Somalia."

16. (C) Comment: In contrast to earlier conversations (Ref B), the exiled MPs appeared more amenable to opening discussions with President Yusuf and the TFG than in the past. Missing from this latest conversation were the forceful anti-President Yusuf statements and calls for his removal from power before the MPs would reengage with the TFG. Similarly, the anti-American sentiment was toned down. While still displeased by U.S. policy, the MPs seem eager to continue an open dialogue with us. While the MPs have not retreated from their position that Ethiopian troops must withdraw from Somalia; this withdrawal no longer appears to be a precondition for engagement with the TFG. In fact, the MPs now seem to view this topic as part of discussions with the TFG. By stepping back from their previous "all or nothing" statements and by including a TFG representation in their proposed conference planning, the MPs may be trying to open the door for negotiations with the TFG. The MPs also seemed to be sounding out USG receptivity to serving as intermediary in delivering this message to President Yusuf.  
End Comment.  
MCINTYRE